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Mission Study Meetings

WHAT THEY ARE
HOW ORGANIZE THEM

The Educational Department, Board of Missions, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York

Mission Study Meetings and How to Conduct Them

I. WHAT THEY ARE

The programmes for mission study meetings which are prepared by the Educational Department are intended to provide those who wish to hold a series of missionary meetings with a careful and thorough plan of action. Guilds, brotherhoods, auxiliaries, sewing circles often desire—or if they do not, they should—to devote a certain number of their meetings, say during Advent or Lent, or both, to a systematic study of some phase of the church's work. Or, again, groups of people decide, quite apart from any already existent organization, to undertake a course of this kind. Now it is to meet such demands, and to see that they are met in the best and most scientific manner, that series of programme meetings are arranged by the Educational Secretary.

II. THEIR VALUE

Of course, the extensive and more exacting work of the "study class" is the best way in which to learn about the progress of the Kingdom, but for one reason or another it is not always practical to hold study classes. Failing this, the best thing to do is to follow out a course of these prepared meetings. Perhaps their greatest value lies in the fact that they are an improvement upon the old-fashioned meeting, which failed so often to produce the desired results in the way of a real awakening of interest and zeal.

Never forget this fearful fact: *Every missionary meeting either does harm or good!* That is to say, if the Master's work is not pre-

sented in an attractive way, it is in an *un*attractive way, and when this last occurs harm is done. How could it be otherwise, seeing the issues that are involved?

Now the programme meetings are so made as to obviate as far as possible this danger. So far as possible they aim to show how the subject may be presented in an attractive and forceful way, and if those who organize them will but endeavor to carry them out in the spirit in which they are prepared they may at least feel that they have done all they can to help the cause. Doubtless some can invent still better programmes than those offered by the Educational Department. It makes no boast that its scheme is the only one. It merely seeks to help those who, unassisted, do not know how, or feel able, to conduct a series of meetings in a profitable way.

III. HOW TO ORGANIZE THEM

1. The first thing to do is to get a programme committee. If there has been a study class in your town get some members of it to be the committee, as they will be well equipped for the work. Otherwise select three or four persons who are enthusiastic and earnest and willing to work.

2. The programme committee having been selected, they should, if it has not already been done, write to their diocesan Educational Secretary, if there is one, or, if not, then to the Educational Secretary at 281 Fourth Avenue, New York, for material and programmes. In reply they will receive a book of suggestions for a series of meetings, at the beginning of which will be found indicated all the books and material necessary for the carrying out of the series.

For the booklet a charge of 5 cents is made; the necessary material for conducting and preparing for a meeting costs $2.00.

Having received the booklet and then having sent to the New York office and obtained the literature, the programme committee proceeds to make its plans. As a rule there will be six meetings outlined, and each one will be divided into three or four topics. These topics deal with different phases of the subjects to be discussed. It is generally best for these topics to be assigned to different members of the group other than those on the committee. The committee should reserve themselves for the purpose of enlivening the meeting.

For example, let us say that the meeting is to be upon the religions of Japan, and that there are three topics. One is given to one member and another to another and the third to a third. Three of the members of the committee make it their duty to help, one for each, the individuals to whom the topics have been assigned, and they take to them the books in which the information needed for preparation is to be found and give them all the help they can in preparing their paper or talk. And then, when it comes to the meeting, if the talk or paper lags, these helpers from the committee interject remarks, or throw in suggestions which not only help the speaker but enliven the affair. All the members of the committee should, as far as possible, be up on each and every topic, and each and every one of them should feel it his duty as far as possible to make a success of each and every paper. Those who know how much interjections help a stupid paper and enlighten a heavy one and improve a good one,

and generally turn a formal talk into an informal one, can realize how important a part of the work this is. Of course, as far as possible, the speaker should carry the burden of the subject, and too many interruptions should not occur; but only the common sense of the committee can tell them how far to carry this matter. The whole idea is to keep things lively and interesting.

It may be asked, why not give the presentation of the topics to the members of the committee? If on their shoulders must rest the responsibility for the effectiveness of each paper and its delivery, why not let them do it all? And the reply to this is that the members of the committee are *interested* in the meetings, to begin with, and that the rest of the people are not necessarily so, and that by giving out the topics to others the committee makes use of the best of all expedients to meet this situation, and secure the interest of all concerned.

So this device is a vital part of the plan, since (1) it enlists the co-operation of a large number, and (2) it still keeps the general direction in the hands of those who are best qualified.

It is, of course, evident that a great deal depends on the committee—the ultimate value of the scheme depends on their earnestness and activity. This being so, certain requirements are to be understood. They must be prepared to *pray* without ceasing that they may perform their part well. The whole thing *depends on prayer.* It has already been emphasized that stupid meetings do harm. Let it now be further emphasized that no pedagogic devices can insure the elimination of stupidity. There is only one way in which this can be done, and that is by

the earnest, honest desire on the part of the members of the committee to make of the meetings a real contribution to the progress of God's Kingdom. So, unless prepared to pray deeply for the plan, it is best not to undertake it.

Then next to prayer the committee should be ready to give time and thought to the work. If they will familiarize themselves with the subjects and be up on the various topics, then they need have no fear—after they have prayed —for the success of the meetings.

Lastly, the committee should realize that what they are doing is direct and definite work for the cause. They are engaged upon a missionary task, and they must approach the work from the point of view of missionaries. They must be interested in the people who attend; they must be eager to open their eyes more widely to the needs and meanings of the church's campaign; they must never let an opportunity pass to help the people whom for that meeting *God has intrusted to them.*

As to the way in which the various topics should be treated, the following suggestions should be given to those who present them:

1. A talk is always more attractive and vivid than a paper, and if the persons appointed for a topic can possibly talk without notes they should be urged to do so. With the help of the committee member who has worked with them this should not be so difficult, as a form of dialogue might be made use of.

2. If a paper is read see to it that it is not a compilation of dry facts. No audience ever profits by hearing a sort of census report or a paper which sounds like a page from an encyclopedia. Only use facts and figures to illustrate. Let them be incidental rather than essential, by which is meant that all lists of missions or enumerations

of converts or dimensions of buildings, or whatever else of dry fact there may be—that these should not be the principal part of the paper. In fact, the best and most interesting papers are those from which all of these uninteresting things could be cut out without hurting its continuity. *Remember* that a list of any kind, or a date, can have no interest for the person who has no vital understanding of that which it refers to. *Remember* that it makes no difference to me whether Ingle was born in 1700 or 1800, until I become interested in him as a person of like passion with myself. *Remember* that unless the things related are told in *terms familiar to the hearers,* they will make no sufficient impression, and, *therefore,* in the paper tell everything in a way that will sound familiar to the audience. For example, use local illustrations: say how Japan compares in size to the State they live in; use local situations to illustrate conditions in the field. Never neglect an opportunity to make the audience realize what it would be like if they lived in the midst of the thing of which the paper treats. If possible, for further ideas on how to catch the ear of an audience, read "The Point of Contact," by Patterson Du Bois, published by Dodd, Mead & Co.; it is elementary but very suggestive.

So much for directions to those who handle the topics. Now a word about the "summing ups," for which a place is made at the end of each meeting. These should be handled by the chairman of the committee, and should be serious attempts to restate in a forceful way the most important points which have been brought out in the papers. These summings up should be given in order to drive home the purpose for which the people have come together.

At the beginning of each programme will be

found an "aim." "Now this "aim" indicates the object of the meeting. That is to say, the people do not come together merely to hear some interesting facts. All missionary meetings are for *inspiration rather than information.* But since without the latter we cannot gain the former, it is necessary that a certain amount of information be given. Now the summing up should be the turning of that information into inspiration.

In other words, the relation between the "aim" given for the meeting and the summing up is immediate. The latter is done in order to bring out the former. The various points which have been made and the facts which have been brought out should be gathered together and brought before the audience in such a way as to send them to their homes eager to know more in order that they may do more. That is what is meant by turning information into inspiration, and that is the whole point and purpose of the meeting.

Unless the people are sent home with a clear resumé of the subjects treated and a resumé which will bring directly before them the importance *to them* of the issues involved; unless the people are sent home with a direct message, then the meeting is apt to have been held in vain. Hence, the chairman must prepare the summing up carefully. By conferences with the rest of the committee it will be possible to know just how the topics are to be presented, and with this information it will not be difficult to sum up so as to enforce the "aim" of the meeting.

The Bible readings and prayers suggested on the programmes are a vital element and are intended to strike as nearly as possible the same note as that struck by the "aim." The chairman should take them himself. In many places it will be found most helpful to use extemporaneous prayers in order to pray about the exact things that have been dealt with, and whenever this can be done it is seriously recommended.

For further information and suggestions, write to your own diocesan Educational Secretary or to the Educational Secretary at 281 Fourth Avenue, New York.